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No bug in his neck, pilot appeals sentence anyway

Though his tale evokes the best of the spy-novel genre, convicted drug pilot and admitted arms smuggler James Pettit is having trouble selling his story to a judge.

Pettit, who says the CIA implanted in his neck tiny electronic devices aimed at controlling his thoughts, recently was sentenced to 15 years for arson by Circuit Judge Howard Gross after physicians who performed a court-ordered examination of Pettit could find no evidence the devices existed.

"We went to court and the judge had the physician there," said Pettit's attorney, Roy Gelber.

Gross, after hearing the results of the examination, rejected an earlier deal under which Pettit had agreed to plead no contest to the arson charge and accept a 30-year sentence if Gross ordered an examination and the results were negative. He was charged with setting fire to his girlfriend's house in June 1983.

Gross, however, decided to sentence Pettit to a 15-year sentence to be served concurrently with the 15-year term Pettit already is serving for a federal drug charge.

"Jim was very unhappy," Gelber said, and is appealing the judge's decision.